

Archives, accessibility, and advocacy: a case study of strategies for creating and maintaining relevance

Jennifer M. Welch, MLIS; Susan D. Hoffius, MS; E. Brooke Fox, MS

See end of article for authors' affiliations.

DOI: 10.3163/1536-5050.99.1.010

Question/Objective: How can a special collection maintain or increase its profile in its parent institution, when that parent institution emphasizes scientific and clinical learning?

Setting/Context: The Waring Historical Library, Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC), preserves and promotes the history of health sciences at MUSC and in South Carolina. As a state entity, MUSC has suffered significant budget cuts for the past several years. In this climate, the Waring had to find ways to maintain relevance in the MUSC community.

Methods: The Waring partnered with the MUSC College of Nursing to explore new ways to build

institutional allies. By combining traditional archival administration with innovative uses of digital collections aimed at institutional promotion and outreach, the Waring's digital library became an advocacy tool that led to the Waring's enhanced value to its parent institution.

Outcomes: The Waring Library is a resource for MUSC development and alumni relations. Tangible outcomes include additional funding from grants, increased staff, no loss of institutional funding, increased access to collections, increased accessions, cultivation of institutional allies for long-term support of the Waring, and development of a template for future partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

Developing and maintaining relevancy is an issue plaguing countless archives, libraries, and museums. It is an ongoing battle to justify history-based enterprises, especially in times of financial turmoil when only "essential" services seem to survive budget cuts. So how can an archive, library, or museum maintain or increase its profile in its parent institution, especially when that parent institution emphasizes scientific and clinical learning? This case study documents one special collection's path toward enhancing its profile and ensuring a secure place in its institutional community through a successful marriage of archival stewardship, digital accessibility, and public relations. A partnership between the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) College of Nursing and the Waring Historical Library serves as a test case for the successful blending of archives, accessibility, and advocacy.

ORGANIZATIONAL PLAYERS

The Waring is a working research library and archive dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the history of health sciences, with a special emphasis on South Carolina and the southeastern United States. Collections document the history of the health sciences in South Carolina as well as the history of the MUSC. Named for Joseph I. Waring Jr., the first director of the library, it houses books, journals, manuscript materials, and museum artifacts documenting the history of the health sciences. It comprises several subunits, including the MUSC University Archives and the Macaulay Museum of Dental History. With the greatest collection of materials documenting the history of both MUSC and medicine in South Carolina, the Waring is a unique resource at

MUSC and in South Carolina. The Waring is a unit of the MUSC Library and as such receives its personnel and facilities funding through the main library budget, which is funded through the provost's office. The MUSC Library pays for the Waring's permanent full-time staff, which includes a curator, assistant curator, university archivist, and digital archivist.

As a unit of the main library, the Waring has access to administrative and technical support. Additional temporary and part-time staff are funded by grants. The Waring Library Society friends group provides a modest endowment to support the Waring's student programming and special events, such as a student medical history club and semi-annual guest lecturers.

MUSC is one of seven freestanding medical universities in the United States [1]. Its six colleges offer degrees in medicine, pharmacy, nursing, dentistry, research, and allied health. Aside from the few interdisciplinary courses offered by various colleges and departments, MUSC has no humanities or liberal arts curriculum. Despite double-digit budget cuts to the university and its departments, the admittedly modest funding and staffing levels for the Waring as a unit of the library have remained stable and even increased. The fate of the Waring might have been very different except for the innovative work to recast the library as more than just a place for old books and papers.

BACKGROUND

In 2005, a new curator arrived at the Waring and undertook an ambitious campaign to redevelop the Waring's relevance to the university by looking for ways to make the Waring more visible, accessible, and useful to a broader audience. While the Waring serves as a resource for hundreds of external historical researchers annually, its internal user group princi-

pally comprises university administrators and public relations personnel. As MUSC promotes its status as the first medical school in the Deep South, its administrators draw on the resources of the Waring to document its historical patrimony. The curator pursued the goal of enhancing the Waring as the premier resource for administrators as well as historians in a number of ways: actively promoting the history of all six colleges through exhibits and lectures; providing accurate, timely, and value-added reference services; and creating MEDICA, MUSC's new digital library.

A review of the literature about archives, advocacy, and digital accessibility yielded very little in the way of specific resources. In the absence of a detailed model, the Waring staff drew on disparate professional literature about the archival stewardship of institutional records to create a unique program designed to increase the relevance and usefulness of the Waring to its institutional parent [2], creation and enhancement of digital archives [3], and role of advocacy in university archives [4, 5].

ARCHIVAL STEWARDSHIP

In late 2006, the MUSC University Archives unit of the Waring approached the college of nursing about preserving and maintaining nursing's historical collection. The college of nursing has a long and well-documented history as the third school of MUSC. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, former nursing dean Ruth Chamberlin gathered together photographs, scrapbooks, correspondence, memoranda, notebooks, ledgers, and other information for her book, *The School of Nursing of the Medical College of South Carolina* [6]. In addition to these early records, there are hundreds of linear feet of files about the administration and evolution of nursing that detail information about specific individuals, initiatives, and programs.

At the time of this first encounter in 2006, the university archivist presented to the college of nursing administration an inventory of the college's materials already in the university archives along with a proposal to administer those materials still in the possession of nursing. This early attempt was unsuccessful. The university archives was still a relatively new unit of the Waring, which was just then embarking on its own relevance renewal plan. Many of the collections were unprocessed and unavailable for research, and, still in its infancy, the university archives could not show how the nursing collection would be more secure and accessible in the university archives. For these reasons, the overture to nursing failed.

In that same year, as part of the overall effort to improve the archival administration of its collections, the Waring pursued and received a processing grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). The grant, "Preserving and Accessing South Carolina's Medical History Collections," funded the processing of ninety-four manuscript collections from the Waring's holdings and the

creation of an encoded archival description (EAD) program. The collections included in the grant were selected because they had high research potential but were largely inaccessible because of inadequate physical and intellectual control. By the end of the 20-month grant period, 192 collections, totaling more than 304 linear feet of materials, were physically reprocessed, including rehousing and weeding materials and identifying and addressing preservation issues. They were described in Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)-compliant finding aids and their MACHiNE-Readable Cataloging (MARC) records loaded into Online Computer Library Center (OCLC). Finally, an EAD program was implemented with the assistance of an engineer from the MUSC Library's Systems Department.

When this grant project was near completion, the Waring curator and MUSC university archivist met again with nursing representatives in October 2007. In contrast to the first meeting, the archivist and curator presented to nursing administrators evidence of a model for the successful treatment of archival materials. They highlighted the products of the NHPRC grant, which showed that the Waring and university archives could successfully process archival collections and provide enhanced access to these materials. They resubmitted an improved proposal to nursing for the transfer of its archival collections to the university archives for arrangement, description, and permanent secure storage. University archives staff would also provide reference services to nursing faculty, staff, students, alumni, and historical researchers. Thanks to the groundwork established by the NHPRC grant, the Waring's proposal was successful and resulted in an initial transfer of nursing records to the university archives.

After receiving nursing's historical collections, the university archives staff began arranging and describing the collections. Over the course of several months, archives personnel processed the materials according to the professional standards of the Society of American Archivists. A finding aid was produced, and an OCLC catalog record was created to provide access to the collection through online catalogs. More than forty-five cubic feet of records documenting the history of the college of nursing were finally available for research use.

DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

The Waring's overall strategy for increasing visibility and relevance included discussions about developing a digital library, called MEDICA. MEDICA was born from the same 2006 NHPRC grant, which mandated the implementation of an EAD program to facilitate worldwide promotion of the collections. The creation of this EAD program evolved into discussions of a digitization project that would present new opportunities for researchers to interact with the collections and likewise for the Waring to interact with researchers. Digitizing the Waring's collections and presenting them online would remove some of the geographical

barriers to access that hinder the efforts of many researchers, thereby giving the Waring a potentially global audience for its holdings.

Even as the Waring explored digitization, the staff at the College of Charleston (COFC) launched the Lowcountry Digital Library (LCDL). With funding from the State Library and the University of South Carolina, the LCDL serves as a regional hub for the statewide South Carolina Digital Library, with responsibility for recruiting and supporting digital projects in the Lowcountry. The COFC Digital Project director approached the Waring staff to discuss opportunities for collaboration with LCDL. The COFC's offer of significant help with license sharing, storage and delivery, server space, and, most importantly, staff expertise meant that costs to MUSC to develop its digital library would be low initially. Once the partnership was established, the MUSC Library provided funding for the Waring to hire a digital archivist to oversee the development and implementation of the digitization program. Initially, this staff funding was tied to the success of MEDICA.

Of the recently processed college of nursing records, the class composite collection was the first to be digitized for inclusion in MEDICA. This collection of photographs was an ideal first project for MEDICA because it was visually interesting and documented more than a century of nursing history. Of equal importance, as a discreet subunit of the nursing collection, it could be digitized quickly and completely in order to yield immediate and tangible results. The collection has broad appeal for historical researchers, nursing alumna, and genealogy researchers because of both content and enhanced features. The names of the students appearing in the photos are full-text searchable, and users can add moderated comments to each photo. Full-text searching of MEDICA's collections makes it easy to establish connections between materials that could have been difficult or required serendipity to establish in an analog environment. Because MEDICA exists as one component of the LCDL, these connections are often inter-institutional, adding further benefits to researchers. Another reason this collection was selected to be the first in MEDICA was to demonstrate to nursing that these historical materials could be employed for present-day use, for example by alumni and development officers. By making these collections relevant, the Waring made itself relevant.

ADVOCACY

Before this project, the nursing collections were known only to a small group of nursing faculty and were inaccessible to most researchers. As a result of this collaboration, the nursing archives are now fully accessible to worldwide users. The class composite collection, in particular, is one of the most popular record groups with MEDICA users, as evidenced by web statistics and reference inquiries. The collection's online use has grown to between 1,000 and 4,000 hits per month. The collection has consistently been in the

Table 1

Usage of college of nursing class composite photograph collection: November 2009–June 2010

Month and year	Item views	Collection rank*
November 2009	800	10
December 2009	1,118	7
January 2010	2,544	2
June 2010	3,872	4

* Rank by items viewed in Low Country Digital Library Collection (56 collections total). 1 is the highest rank.

top 10 most viewed collections in the LCDL, which includes 56 collections from 8 different partner institutions. Table 1 shows a sampling of web statistics generated by the OCLC CONTENTdm software that powers the digital collections. The table shows both the number of item views for the collection, as well as its rank within LCDL, compared to item views of other LCDL collections. As the Waring's relationship with nursing has grown and developed over the course of the project, the web statistics for the class composite collection continue to rise.

Offering these photographs online reinforced the relationship between the university archives and nursing by providing enhanced accessibility to historical collections. The online database of photos makes it easy for nursing faculty and staff to quickly identify and request images for use in promotional materials and other publications. This accessibility is yielding dividends for nursing's development office, which has received numerous calls and emails from family of alumnae whose photographs are discovered in MEDICA. These calls reflect positive feelings toward the college and in some cases lead to financial contributions for nursing. Through MEDICA, the Waring has been able to promote the college and preserve its history.

In addition to performing traditional archival services such as collection management and reference, the Waring has used MEDICA for both content delivery and advocacy. MEDICA helps the Waring demonstrate relevance to the university by providing enhanced access to historical content to administrators, public relations officers, and others charged with promoting MUSC. Traditionally, digitization in an archival environment provides improved accessibility to historical material. In this case, the Waring has gone one step further to use digitization for promotion and advocacy. The successful partnership between nursing and the Waring demonstrates the opportunities that exist for archives to enhance their own visibility and serve their institutional communities.

OUTCOMES

Increased grant funding has been one of the most tangible outcomes of this project. Because of the demonstrable success of its projects beginning with the NHPRC grant in 2006, the Waring has secured additional grants to fund other digitization partner-

ships. The NHPRC processing grant, which was not particularly unusual or novel, laid the groundwork for future projects. The Waring staff has capitalized on each success by pursuing complementary projects and funding. Between 2008 and 2010, more than \$150,000 has been raised to support MEDICA. Of particular note are a 2-year \$70,000 grant to digitize the approximately 10,000 pages of minutes of the MUSC and a 3-year \$76,000 grant from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation to digitize approximately 500 artifacts from the Waring, nursing, college of dental medicine, and college of pharmacy. In addition, the success of the Waring's programs has led to permanent personnel funding for the digital archivist from the MUSC Library, which champions MEDICA as an innovative program with both academic and public relations uses to the MUSC community and beyond.

Using nursing as a model, the university archives staff has been able to illustrate that preserving archival collections has long-term historical importance, but also shorter-term public relations value. The processing project provided the Waring with a foundation for approaching other colleges about preserving their archives.

The successful combination of archival administration and digital outreach, specifically the use of MEDICA as a value-added advocacy tool, now serves as the foundation for the pursuit of other similar enterprises. Specifically, the university archives points to its work on the physical custody and administration of the nursing collection when it solicits materials from other MUSC colleges and departments. In fiscal year 2010, the university archives received collections totaling more than thirty cubic feet from previously underrepresented colleges and departments, including the office of student programs, college of pharmacy, and office of the president. The Waring has parlayed the successes of nursing and MEDICA to develop other grant-funded projects, both large and small, that contribute to the growth of the digital library and the usefulness of the Waring to MUSC, in fulfillment of its mission to preserve and promote the history of the health sciences in South Carolina.

The strategy is simple, and others can apply it: Know what is in your collection so you can identify possible partners and projects. Identify potential users and allies and understand that their specific needs will likely be different than those of more traditional researchers. Think creatively about how your collections can be adapted to meet these unique needs. Promote your activities, collections, and partnerships, and let others know of your achievements as a means to recruit partners and develop projects. Stay alert to

opportunities for unforeseen collaborative projects that can benefit your program and your users. Some projects will take time to mature, while others will be ready for immediate implementation.

CONCLUSION

Over the last several years, the Waring pursued opportunities to be useful to its parent institution, while still fulfilling its mission to preserve and promote an interest in the history of the health sciences. The Waring analyzed its internal user groups—public relations, development, and central administration—and recast its collections to appeal to their unique needs. In its partnership with the college of nursing, the Waring successfully paired traditional archival administration with innovative digital outreach to show that historical collections can be used effectively by alumni affairs, marketing, and development offices for fundraising, recruitment, and promotion. The Waring has shown that a library can be an indispensable campus resource by actively developing new uses for traditional historical materials and innovative ways to deliver those materials.

REFERENCES

1. Association of American Medical Colleges. Brief definitions of fields: organization and governance [Internet]. The Association [cited 7 Jun 2010]. <<http://www.aamc.org/data/ocd/fielddefinitions.htm>>.
2. Yakel E, Bost LL. Understanding administrative use and users in university archives. *Am Archivist*. 1994 Fall;57:596–615.
3. Griner AR. Where's the context? enhancing access to digital archives. *Provenance*. 2008;26:59–69.
4. Stout L. The role of university archives in the campus information environment. *Am Archivist*. 1995 Spring;58:124–40.
5. Hackman LJ, O'Toole JM, Fagerlund L, Dojka J. Case studies in archives program development. *Am Archivist*. 1990 Fall;53:548–60.
6. Chamberlin R. *The School of Nursing of the Medical College of South Carolina: its story*. Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan Company; 1970.

AUTHORS' AFFILIATIONS

Jennifer M. Welch, MLIS, welchje@musc.edu, Digital Archivist; **Susan D. Hoffius, MS**, hoffius@musc.edu, Curator; **E. Brooke Fox, MS**, foxeb@musc.edu, University Archivist; Waring Historical Library, Medical University of South Carolina, 175 Ashley Avenue, MSC 403, Charleston, SC 29425

Received June 2010; accepted September 2010